

David and Saul (1 Samuel 17)

Last week, we had our maiden voyage into this newest series around here called *The Life of David* where we are looking at the life of Israel's greatest king, David who is the benchmark for success in the Old Testament. We are going to spend the next few weeks dropping in on this remarkable man of faith who confronted God at every turn in his life. And I just love David's story because it is so real and so honest and so hopeful for anyone who would follow God in life.

So last week, we talked about what made David so remarkable and it was his heart, that inner being of thoughts, emotions, and will that was shaped by God's own life. And this week we're moving on to a very familiar story and chapter in David's life.

Illustration – But before we go there, I want to draw your attention to Hurricane Jeanne. Here's a picture of her. [SHOW HURRICANE JEANNE PICTURE.] When this storm hit Florida in September of 2004, she was a category-3 storm meaning the winds were over 110 miles per hour and caused 9 to 12 feet surges in the tides.

I mean, Hurricane Jeanne was no small blip on the weather map. That storm brought floods and winds that caused millions and millions of dollars in damage, displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes in the Pacific Islands just south of Florida, and killed a little over 3000 people in that area of the Pacific.

But there is a silver lining to Jeanne's clouds literally. Hurricanes and tropical storms routinely uncover several feet of sand off the beaches and dunes they hit. And after Hurricane Jeanne hit the Floridian beaches, that storm uncovered 180 near-mint silver coins worth more than \$40,000 that were found by a 52-year-old man named Joel Ruth according to *the Billings Gazette*. It turns out that these silver coins had been buried since 1715 when a Spanish treasure fleet sunk in a summer hurricane on its way to King Philip V of Spain. That means those silver coins were buried in that beach for some 289 years before Joel Ruth found them when Hurricane Jeanne uncovered them in Florida.

Think about it: it took a hurricane to uncover buried treasure that had been there all along for 289 years. A hurricane is what it took to reveal what was really lying underneath that beach.

So let me pose a question for us: what does it take for God to reveal what's really underneath our nice exteriors? I mean, I know that God can see what is underneath our nice exteriors, but how does God reveal that to us and to others? What is God's hurricane to reveal what is underneath and in our character?

And to get even a bit more personal for a moment, what do you think would be uncovered and revealed in you when God does that? What sort of character, what sort of reality do you think would bubble up to the surface from within you if God's hurricane were to come to you?

This is the very issue tackled and personified in a very familiar story and chapter of David's life. Whether you've read the Bible or not, whether you've read the Old Testament or not, whether you know anything about David or not, you know this story. It is the classic underdog story of David and Goliath.

And for everything you may have heard or known about that classic story and what it teaching, I want you to do something this morning. I want you to set that aside for a bit to re-engage this story because that familiarity may have skewed what the story is really there to teach us about life with God.

That is just what happened to me when I talked it over a number of years ago with a mentor of mine, Nick Lillo. I was absolutely blindsided when he pointed out some nuances and background to the story that I had completely breezed past because I was so familiar with this story of David and Goliath.

And that completely shifted what I understood the story to teach about living with God through Jesus Christ. So with that mind, let's drop in on that very familiar story of David and Goliath that begins in 1 Samuel 17:1. That's 1 Samuel 17:1. If you have one of the blue Bibles, it is page 202. That's 1 Samuel 17:1.

Now, as you are turn there, I want to remind you of what has happened leading up to these moments in this story. There was a time when Israel had no king. And in those days, Israel complained and whined that they wanted a king just like every other nation around them. So God gave them a king that looked like every other king around them.

His name was Saul. Saul was head and shoulders above every other man in Israel. He was a head taller than any man in Israel. He had the natural abilities to lead an army in war. He was a man without equal in Israel, so he looked every part the king of Israel and her champion.

But Saul had a fatal flaw. While he had all the competence and experience to be a great king, he didn't have the heart and character necessary to do so well, especially under the direction of God. Saul was impetuous and disobedient to God.

So even though Saul remains the official king of Israel, God moves on to another king that he's providentially moving into the royal throne. David. Why? Because of David's remarkable heart that beats for God.

But God's movement of David into the royal throne isn't instantaneous. God lets David build his case to Israel for claiming the throne, not with words but with his life. And that's where this story that we call David and Goliath fits in... as a part of David's case built not with words but with the quality of his life because in it God reveals who they really and truly are to themselves and the world.

So with that in mind, look at how this very familiar story starts out in Samuel 17:1. READ 1 SAMUEL 17:1-3: “Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Socoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.”

The stage is set for the conflict we know is coming. The Philistines have invaded Israel from the west. You can see from this map where Philistia, their homeland is located [SHOW MAP].

Philistia was on the west coast and they enjoyed that lifestyle. They sailed the seas. They produced massive amounts of the much-desired olive oil. They were ahead of most other countries in terms of the technology they used, especially with iron that was absent in Israel, which is a key advantage in war because what do you think armor and spears and swords are made of? Iron.

Illustration – For all intents and purposes, the Philistines are the Californians of their day with Silicon Valley for technology, Napa Valley for highly sought vineyard products, and a general love of the ocean and beaches.

And they were the big kids on the block with their iron swords and spears and armor. And these big kids on the block have invaded Israel, so Israel has come out to meet the challenge at the Valley of Elah. So they converge where that squiggle is on the map.

Here’s a picture of it today [SHOW PICTURE OF THE VALLEY OF ELAH]. On one hill were the Israelites, probably this one. On another hill on the other side of the valley were the Philistines, probably this one. And the valley floor below separate these two armies. And just to the side of the hill occupied by the Israelites was a small brook with small, water-smoothed stones in it. Does that sound at all familiar?

Now, the Valley of Elah is not a place with little or no consequence. The Valley of Elah was a major thoroughfare for Israel to reach trading routes with the rest of the known world.

Illustration – To lose the Valley of Elah is akin to losing access to I-95 and I-495 for us. The Philistines threaten to cut them off from I-93 and I-495 of their day and so cut them off from the rest of the world. Israel would lose the freedom to get to the rest of the known world through this valley.

So this is no minor skirmish. Israel’s backs are against the wall here. Israel is facing the big boys on the block and down a bunch of runs with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning. They’re backs are against the wall and they’ve been pushed there by the bully on the block.

That is the scene painted here by the author. But then he continues and adds into that scene and tension one giant named Goliath. Look at how he is described beginning in verse 4.

READ 1 SAMUEL 17:4-7: “A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. His spear shaft was like a weaver’s rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.”

The best of the best steps out of the shadows of the Philistine army. He’s the champion of the Philistines and his name is Goliath. He’s a mountain of a man, nine feet nine inches tall. And I know, you’re saying, “Come on. There’s no way he’s actually nine feet tall because no one is nine feet tall. That’s just an exaggeration.”

I asked the same thing, so I was curious and did some digging. It turns out that we’ve actually found letters written in Egypt about 200 years before David describing fierce warriors in this area of the world that were seven to nine feet tall. And it turns out that archaeologists have uncovered two female skeletons in this area of the world from about 100 years before David that are seven feet tall. So this probably isn’t hyperbole and it isn’t so far fetched to believe. Goliath is a mountain of a man.

Goliath is armored to the hilt. From his head to his toes, he wore a helmet, armor and bronze shin pads. The only exposed part of Goliath was his face. But even his face was only mildly exposed because Goliath has a kid standing in front of him holding a huge rectangular shield for just an extra measure of protection. Goliath is encased in armor and protection.

And Goliath is armed to the teeth with the most recent iron weaponry. He’s got a javelin strapped to his back and he’s twirling a spear with a huge tip weighing 15 pounds. And Goliath is twirling it like a cheerleader twirls a baton to use an image from Eugene Peterson. Goliath is huge and fierce and imposing.

He’s the best of the best armed to the teeth and armored to the hilt. And what’s worse is that he’s got a seriously sour attitude. Look at verse 8.

READ 1 SAMUEL 17:8-9: “Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us.””

READ 1 SAMUEL 17:10-11, 16: “Then the Philistine said, “This day I defy the ranks of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other.” On hearing the Philistine’s words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified... **[THEN SKIP DOWN TO VERSE 16]** For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.”

Goliath arrogantly and egotistically challenges them to a champion fight. He bullies them and teases them from the valley floor below. Picture it: from that valley floor below, he's yelling and berating Israel up on that hill about showing up for battle only to sit there twiddling their thumbs instead of fighting like men.

So he challenges them to a duel between champions and the winner will determine the winner between the armies. "Get off your hands and send your best to fight me to determine this war, if you dare," Goliath taunts and then he spits in their face and indirectly on the face of the God whom they follow just to rub it in.

And he keeps doing this day after day after day for well over a month. And day after day after day, everyone there shrinks back in fear and they do so understandably.

This whole scene screams of pressure. The stakes of the battle. The size of the champion, Goliath. The depth of the insults. This is a pressure cooker. Goliath is applying pressure, nothing more and nothing less. This is pressure being applied in life. Can you relate here? Do you know that experience of pressure in life whether it is a pressure the size of Goliath or considerably smaller?

Do you know that experience of pressure from a commute, a deadline, a sagging performance review at work, a sagging grade in a class, an argument with your spouse or kids or friends, a financial crunch where you don't know how you'll make it, or a serious health scare in you or a loved one?

Maybe you're even experiencing it right now in life as hard as it is for me to believe on a long, beautiful Memorial Day weekend like we have going on. But do you know that experience of pressure in life? That's the experience of Goliath.

And you know this experience of Goliath here for the Israelites. This battle, the presence of Goliath, and his insufferable challenges are nothing more than a pressure point on the lives of the Israelites. Pressure.

And sometimes, we think that pressure only brings out the worst in people. But I'll let you in on something here: that is simply not true. Pressure only shows what is really there. Pressure is God's hurricane in our lives to reveal what really lies underneath our nice exteriors. Pressure, difficulty, and stress strip away our facades and masks and appearances that we put up for other people to see. And it shows us for what we really are.

Illustration – We're a lot like an orange. No matter how hard you look at an orange, you'll never be able to see underneath the peel and see the quality of the fruit inside. That is unless you apply pressure and squeeze to peel the orange. And so it is with us. Only when we are squeezed, only when we are under pressure do we really show who we are, and so pressure is God's hurricane in our lives.

Pressure reveals who we are. But what exactly does it reveal about us? What part of us is unearthed and displayed when we face pressure in life?

Well, we have to look no further than how people in this story react to Goliath who acts as a pressure point here. All we have to do is look at what is displayed and unearthed in the people here in reaction to Goliath.

So let me ask you something: who fights Goliath? That's not a trick question. Who fights Goliath? David. Right. That's one reaction that we'll look at later.

But let's look at a totally different reaction first by raising a different question about this story. Instead of asking who fought Goliath, let's ask this: who *should* have fought Goliath? Not who actually did fight Goliath, but who *should* have fought Goliath?

Remember these Old Testament writers are crafty and deliberate. They never waste space giving details just for the sake of giving details. And there are some really striking and usual details given here that aren't normally included in Hebrew stories.

Typically, Hebrew authors don't give physical descriptions in their stories because I think they would say that a person is known more by their family lines and their actions than by what they look like. Think about the stories of Jesus in the gospels for a second. There's a lot about Jesus' family lines and his teachings and his ministry, but there's nothing about what Jesus looks like.

So the very description of Goliath should make us pause here because it is very detailed and the author is tipping his hand here on whom he believes should fight Goliath.

Just think about Goliath for a second. Goliath is the Philistine champion. Goliath is tall. Goliath is wearing armor. Goliath is wielding weapons of iron. Now, search your memory banks for someone in Israel who mirrors Goliath. Who should act as the Israelite champion? Who is a head taller than any other Israelite? Who probably has access to armor and iron weaponry given his status and prestige and wealth in Israel? Who?

Saul. Saul was the Israelite champion as her king mirroring Goliath as the Philistine champion. Saul was a giant among his people mirroring Goliath's size. Saul was the king, and so he had almost exclusive access to armor and weapons that were so rare in Israel at this time. I know that because later on in the story after David volunteers to fight Goliath, Saul tries to dress him in his armor and his sword. You can check it out a bit later in verses 38 and 39.

Saul was supposed to fight Goliath, for he's Goliath's nearest equal among the Israelites. That's what the author is trying to point out to us with all those physical descriptions. And how did Saul react to Goliath? We already saw this, but it is worth looking at again. Look back at verse 11. READ 1 SAMUEL 17:11: "On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were [WHAT DOES IT SAY THERE?] dismayed and [WHAT?] terrified."

Saul reacted with fear. Fear. Now, don't misunderstand here. It isn't just that Saul felt fear. Goliath and his pressure was something to feel fear over. But Saul didn't just feel fear. He lived fear when that pressure was applied with Goliath.

After the appearance of Goliath on that valley floor and his daily insults and challenges, David comes on to the battlefield scene. David's dad sent him to take food to his three older brothers who were at the battle.

These three brothers were the only ones in the family who were older than 20, and so they were the only one who were old enough to fight in a war. But as David is giving his brothers the food, he sees Goliath and hears the insults and he sees the reaction of the Israelite army, so he turns to some of the men who tell him what's going on. Look at what they say to David in verse 25.

READ 1 SAMUEL 17:25: “Now the Israelites had been saying, “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father's family from taxes in Israel.””

Saul's strategy for dealing with Goliath? Find someone else. Pay them off with money. Pay them off with a marriage into the royal family. Pay them off with a tax-exempt status in Israel. And he waited for 40 days for someone, anyone to come forward. Saul's fear drives him to retreat and to shirk his responsibilities as the king. At this David can't believe his ears, so he asks the soldiers to clarify. And they tell him the same exact thing: Saul's retreating and trying to find someone else.

But Saul's profound fear doesn't stop there because eventually David is brought to his attention. Eventually, Saul gets wind of a boy, a very young boy who's still wet behind the ear. So young is David at this point that he's not even supposed to be participating in a war because he's not even 20. But Saul gets wind that David has a fire in his belly over Goliath and summons him to question him about it. When David tells Saul: “Let me at Goliath. I'll fight him.”

Look at what Saul says in verse 33. READ 1 SAMUEL 17:33: “Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.”” Saul sees the inequity between David who's wet behind the ears and the battle-hardened, battle-tested Goliath. He sees the lunacy in sending David into the ring to face Goliath.

But David argues why he should fight Goliath, only to have Saul say at the very end of verse 37... READ 1 SAMUEL 17:37B: “Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you.”” What sense does it make to send a young boy into hand-to-hand combat with a battle-hardened, battle-tested mountain of a man?

Illustration – What sense does that make on any planet? That makes about as much sense as letting a toddler play in traffic or letting your ten-year-old play with an angry cobra.

But Saul is so deeply fearful and so desperate to retreat and to skirt his responsibilities that he agrees to let David of all people to fight Goliath. Pressure reveals who Saul was and he was someone of fear.

His fear wasn't just a feeling. His fear was an activity of avoidance. He froze, retreated, and shirked his responsibilities when the pressure was on. That's fear. It's retreating and avoiding the situation and shirking responsibility in a situation.

Illustration – I ran across a story about William “The Refrigerator” Perry. He got that nickname while he played on the defensive line in the NFL because he was shaped like a brick. He was 6-foot, 2-inches tall and weighed 382 pounds.

The Fridge was a mammoth man who played in the tough world of football's trenches. But he was deathly afraid of the dentist, like some of you are. So he didn't visit a dentist for 20 years. He didn't even go when he teeth and gums were almost in unbearable pain. He didn't even go when his teeth began to fall out. He didn't even go when his gums suffered chronic infection.

Eventually, he went to the dentist, but by then he was 45 years old and half of his teeth had fallen out and the cost to fix his mouth was \$60,000. Whatever else you can say about that situation, for all the size and toughness of William "The Refrigerator" Perry, he was someone of fear when it came to the dentist. That's the activity of fear where there's avoidance at any cost, where there's retreat from a situation, and where there's the shirking of responsibility.

That's fear in the face of pressure. And just like Saul, pressure reveals who we are, whether we are someone of fear. So when you think back to the Goliaths you've faced this past week, the recent pressures in your life, what has come out of you?

Whether that pressure has been light and momentary or heavy and sustained or something in between those extremes, has fear come out of you in those moments? When those Goliaths have come, have you seen yourself retreat or avoid or shirk responsibilities?

Did you retreat from the discomfort of pressure into the comfort of something else like a nap, or shopping, or food, not just for recreation but to retreat and avoid that pressure?

Did you avoid what you needed to do despite the pressure by procrastinating and going to the television, video games, or the Internet?

Did you shirk your responsibilities when that pressure came by handing it off to someone else or simply standing there until someone else picked it up?

Has fear cropped up when you've faced pressure? And it is just crucial that we recognize whether this is a pattern or not in our lives because fear snowballs in our lives. The more we live out fear in small pressure, the more likely we'll live it in other pressures and in bigger pressures.

But that's what's great about this story because David shows us a better way. David shows us the opposite of fear. He shows us faith in the face of pressure.

David faced the same pressure Saul did with Goliath, yet he had a completely different reaction to that pressure. There's an ongoing pattern in David's words that betray his reaction and underscore why he did what he did in fighting Goliath. Let me show you that pattern.

When David first stepped onto the scene with the armies perched atop their hills and he saw Goliath walking around on the valley floor and he heard his insults and challenges, David's first words betray why he had a fire in his belly. Look at some of David's first words when he sees the whole scene with the armies and with Goliath in the second part of verse 26. READ 1 SAMUEL 17:26B: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

Then later on when David argues his case to Saul about being Israel's champion to face Goliath, David says this to Saul beginning in verse 34. READ 1 SAMUEL 17:34-37A: "But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.""

Then when David stood before Goliath and readied for combat, he endured slurred and insults from Goliath. But in the midst of that pressure, David says this in verse 45.

READ 1 SAMUEL 17:45-47: "David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands.""

And the rest as they say is history. David runs toward Goliath and Goliath runs towards David. And David slings a stone toward Goliath hitting him with a stone in the only exposed area of his whole armored body, his forehead. It was a one in a million shot. And Goliath tumbled to the ground in a heap and David killed him. Then Israel was emboldened and rallied behind him to route the Philistines and win the battle.

But did you notice that pattern in David's words that betrayed why he did what he did in facing Goliath? At every turn with an ever-increasing amount of pressure, David's words are ones of faith in God. The vast majority of words spoken about God and his power and his character in this story are uttered by David, no one else.

When everyone else saw the pressure-filled circumstances of Goliath, David saw God. While Saul saw Goliath, David saw God. Pressure revealed who David was and he was someone of faith. This faith was one where he saw God instead of pressure-filled circumstances.

Illustration – Let me use an analogy here. Newspapers called it the Dance of Danger. It is the walk many construction workers make when they are building suspension bridges because they have to walk along swaying catwalks and high towers being blown by the wind and often times hundreds of feet in the air. In fact, this dance of danger is so hazardous that officials at one time could count on one death per one million dollars spent on building a suspension bridge.

But the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge broke new ground for safety. Along with a number of safety measures, the most effective safety device without question was the use of a trapeze net. They strung this giant trapeze net underneath the workers as they engaged in the dance of danger. And that net saved 19 workers who fell and delivered them from certain death.

In much the same way, Saul and David engaged in a dance of danger here with Goliath. Saul only saw how far he could fall and how dangerous Goliath was, so he reacted with fear. But David saw the net that is God who delivers in life's dance with danger.

And by seeing God, David knew that whether he lived or died in fighting Goliath, God's purposes would be accomplished in and through David. That's faith in the face of pressure. And just like David, pressure reveals who we are, whether we are a person of faith.

You see, what this whole story points out to us is that pressure reveals who we are, whether we are someone of fear or someone of faith.

And whether you see a pattern of fear or see fear popping up every once in a while from within you in the face of pressure, the good news is that we can learn to live like David.

Through Jesus Christ, we can live totally different and break that pattern of fear to live out a bold and courageous faith that sees God and believes God will work his purposes in and through us no matter what may happen to us. We can learn David's faith because well, David learned his faith from the tutoring of God.

In that section we saw earlier where David argues his case to Saul for fighting Goliath, David betrays how he learned his faith in God and how he learned to see God in circumstances. David talked about his God experiences with a bear and a lion and uses those experiences as a stepping-stone to this greater pressure situation of Goliath.

Just look at how David sums it up in the first part of verse 37. READ 1 SAMUEL 17:37A: "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine."

David didn't just have the experience of God delivering him in pressure packed situations with the lion and the bear. He remembered them and that fueled a greater faith to see God in the midst of that pressure packed situation with Goliath.

David took those God moments he experienced and filed them away in his memory so that when pressure came, he would recall them and remember how to see God in that next situation. That's how he built his faith in God, one filed away experience with him, on top of another, on top of another.

And much like David, we have our own experiences with God. There is that experience of asking Christ to come into our lives to forgive us of our sin and to lead us in life that sweeps us up into a relationship with God. There is the experience of baptism where we proclaim our faith in Jesus Christ to the public despite fear or intimidation.

There is the experience of God coming through for us when we are in a tight situation because we are connected to him through Christ. There is the experience of God comforting us in the face of loss and grief. There is the experience of God freeing us from a sin or a habit that nagged us that was unleashed through the cross of Christ.

We all have experiences of God delivering us, working in us, and maturing us in the face of tough situations.

So the question I have for you is this: have you filed those experiences away in your memory bank? Do you ever take time to relive and recount those concrete experiences with God through Jesus Christ?

Do you ever remember how God has worked in you and through you so that when pressure comes, you are able to fall back into those experiences and fuel a greater faith in you?

It is not enough to simply experience God's deliverance. We have to file it away so that we can remember how to see him in that next pressure-packed situation we'll face and so fuel faith in God through Christ within us.

Pressure reveals who we are, whether we are someone of fear or someone of faith. And the simple reality is we will all walk out those doors this morning and we will have our own dance of danger. We will all face pressure. Big pressure. Little pressure. Pressure at the job and in school. Pressure at home and in the neighborhood. Pressure with clients and with friends.

We will all face a dance of danger. So would you dance it with faith and not with fear?

Would you dance it looking for the net of God below you and ignoring the height of that dance?

Would you dance it remembering God will catch you because he's done it so many times before?

Would you dance the dance of danger with faith in God and dance it like David danced it with Goliath?